

# DADDY ISSUES

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**John Boston**

Patti Lavelle was born Patricia Anne Lavelle. She was born with a mother and father biologically, but to Patti, she never really had a father.

He was absent for most of her life, save for brief interludes when he would show up for a few weeks or months, then vanish without any warning. She tried not to let it affect her, but to say she was unaffected by her lack of a father would be untrue. Most days it wasn't really an issue for her. It did tend to show up in her relationships with other men. She just could never really get close to a man before anxiety set in and she would break it off before it became serious. She was now in her mid-twenties and without a serious relationship under her belt. That was until she met Seth. He had tattoos and a bad attitude. He could also be very charming and sincere. She wasn't sure if it was true love or just her taking care of him. At any rate, they had been together for over a year and were living with each other, when her mom called out of the blue.

"Your father's back," she said very unenthusiastically

"Really? Wow....how long's it been this time?"

"Almost eight years....the son of a bitch doesn't even look a day older. Those incredible genetics wasted on a piece of crap like him....it just isn't fair." her mother said

"Do you think he'll try to see me?"

"Yeah, he said he can't wait to see you....good luck. Just don't encourage him whatever you do. His story this time is the most ridiculous one yet. Claimed he's been traveling to other planets with aliens. Of all the men in the world to knock me up, why did it have to be him?"

"Well, I don't want to see him. Can you just call him and tell him to stay away. The last time he stayed around, It almost felt like I had a father, then he took right off again."

"Well, don't go too hard on him. He's sick honey. It's not his fault. How's Seth?"

"He's good. He lost his job at the store. Some kind of misunderstanding about his schedule. He's been looking for another job, but it's not easy. Hey, mom, I gotta get ready for work. Somebody in this house has to bring home a paycheck." Patti hung up the phone. As much as she hated her job, she hated seeing her father again even more.

She worked as a bartender at the local pub in town. On the weekends, she would leave with over a hundred dollars in tips. She had been ogled, grabbed, harassed, even groped by men older than her father. Serving watered-down drinks to watered-down people wasn't her cup of tea, but it paid the bills, so she kept going. She had a headache and was offered a hundred dollars to blow a

frat boy in the parking lot when her father walked in. She saw him out of the corner of her eye and tried to ignore him, but there were no other customers at the bar. She knew she had to get it over with sooner or later, so she took a deep breath and turned around.

"Hi Sam," she said

"Hello, sweetheart. Look at you, you're all grown up. You've grown into a beautiful woman." he said

There was an awkward silence between them, broken by the waitress putting her drink order down on the bar.

"How long are you staying this time?"

"Long enough to make sure you're gonna be okay," he said

"I'm fine. I've made it this far without your help, I think I'll be okay."

"Can I see you tomorrow?"

"Yeah sure. We can do lunch."

"Okay, lunch it is, see you then." he turned around to head out the door

"Sam? Don't you want my number?" she asked

"I know where you live. I'll pick you up at one," he said and left the bar.

Patti wanted to tell him to go straight to hell, but she had two drink orders to make and a meal to bring out. Her daddy drama would have to wait until tomorrow.

She had just woken up and made herself a pot of coffee when her father arrived. She hoped it would be about half an hour of awkwardness, then he would leave. She had buried her feelings towards her father a long time ago. She figured he was here to ask her for money. He rang the bell and she let him in.

"Thanks for meeting me on such short notice. I won't take much of your time," he said as Patti led him into her kitchen.

"Do you want some coffee?" she asked

"Coffee....gosh, I haven't had coffee in years. Yeah, I'll have a cup," he said

Patti poured him a cup and put it down in front of him. He smelled it and then took a sip.

"Boy, it's been a while."

"They don't have coffee where you've been?"

"Ah no, no they don't," he replied

"So, where exactly have you been all this time?" she asked, sitting down at the table.

"Well, I guess you could say I've been traveling."

"Traveling where?"

"Well, Patti, I've been to places people can only dream about."

"Like Tahiti?"

"No, not exactly. Look, I know this is going to be very hard for you to believe, but I am an astronaut of sorts, only I don't work for NASA."

"An astronaut? Jesus Sam, this ought to be good."

"Patti, look I know you're upset with me. I realize I've been absent for most of your life. I feel very badly about that. If there was one thing in my life I could change....."

"Sam, why are you here? No bullshit please, just tell me the truth."

"I'm here because you're in trouble. I am still your father and you are my little girl and I don't want to see anything happen to you," he said looking into her eyes.

"I think I'm okay Sam. I appreciate your concern, but whatever it is, I'm sure I can handle it. I've made it this far."

"Would it kill you to call me dad? You are the only person in the whole world who can call me that," said Sam

"Don't push it Sam. You are just as much a stranger to me as are my customers at the bar. You're just another face in the crowd."

"Fair enough. It would just mean a lot to me that's all," he said

"Well having a real man in my life would mean a lot to me too, but I guess I'm asking for too much. So, if you have nothing else to say, I've got to get ready for work," said Patti leaving the table.

"I've got so much to say. Patti, I've been to places no other human being has ever gone. I've been to other planets and met aliens. I wished you could have been there with me, but I have to follow the rules, at least most of them. I snuck away to be with you. You are my little girl. You'll always be my little girl."

"Are you listening to yourself? Sam, you're crazy. Like bat shit crazy. I have enough toxic people in my life, I don't need anymore." she said and opened the front door.

"Didn't you say we could have lunch? C'mon, I'll buy."

"You're pushing it Sam," she said

Sam knew it was time for him to go. He finished his coffee and got up from the table. He stopped in front of the door and reached into his pocket and pulled out a small glass jar.

"These seeds are from a tree on Mars. The last tree on the planet, next to the last bit of water on the planet. I took these for you. They're yours, just don't ever plant them okay?" he said and handed her the jar.

"Seeds from Mars....okay Sam, thanks a bunch. How long are you going to stay around this time?" she asked

"Until I know you're okay," he said and walked down the steps.

"Jesus, what a loser," said Patti to herself as she closed the door.

Patti poured drinks and served food all night. She got home around 2 AM and was exhausted. She found Seth sitting on the sofa stoned out of his mind watching reruns of Laverne and Shirley.

"Tough day at the office dear?"

"No, just the usual bullshit. My father stopped by today. Told me he was an astronaut and he's been to other planets."

"Like Star Trek?"

"I guess. I just hope he goes away as quickly as he came."

"You and your dad don't get along huh?"

"I never knew him long enough to form an opinion of him. He seems like an ok guy, just sucks ass at the whole parent thing. He and my mom only had sex three times and now, here I am."

"I saw this guy staring at the apartment today on the street. I wonder if it was your father?" said Seth

"Probably....hey did you pay the electric bill today?"

"Oh, damn, I knew I forgot something, I'm sorry, I'll do it tomorrow."

"Don't forget. I'm gonna turn in, I'm beat," she said heading towards the bedroom.

"Hey, what are these?" he said, holding up the jar with the seeds in them.

"My father said they are a souvenir from space. He told me that they are from a tree on Mars. Can you believe that? I think he actually believes some of his bullshit." she said and headed into the bedroom

"Seeds from Mars huh? Wonder what those would be worth?" said Seth holding up the jar and looking at the strange seeds inside.

The next night at the Bar, Sam was waiting for her.

"Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"I got a break in about fifteen minutes. Meet me out back," said Sam holding a drink tray

She wasn't in the mood for her father, or anyone else. She spilled a drink tray on a customer, something she had never done before. The customer was already drunk. He yelled at her for five minutes before his girlfriend told him to shut up and have another drink. She lit up a cigarette and sat down on the curb.

"Since when do you smoke?" asked Sam emerging from the shadows.

"I picked it up in college. I'll quit....someday."

"Do you have any idea what cigarettes do to your body?"

"What do you want Sam?"

"Your boyfriend Seth. How well do you know him?"

"I don't know, how well do we really know anybody?" replied Patti

"Come on Patti, how well do you know him?"

"We've been together for almost seven months. Does that help?"

"Sam, I think you should stay away from him. He's no good. He's not going to make your life any better."

Patti put down her cigarette and looked at Sam. He didn't appear to look much older than she was, even though he was twenty-three years older. Her mom was right, fabulous genetics wasted on a loser like him. It just wasn't fair.

"What do you want from me, Sam? Do you want some money? I don't have very much, but you can have it if you just promise to shut up and stay out of my life. I don't want you around." she said coldly

Sam seemed to be genuinely hurt by what she had just said. He didn't reply in anger, he took a deep breath before he responded.

"Look, honey. I was chosen for this mission before I was born. I didn't have a choice. I hated being away from you. I hated not being there for you. I was gone for six months my time. 8 years passed here on Earth. I can never get that time back, I'm so sorry, please don't hate me. Please don't shut me out. I know I can never make up for the lost time. Just understand I had to go. I had no choice."

"Do you think it was easy for my mom and me growing up? Watching every other family take vacations and spend Christmas together? Do you know how hard it was for us? Some Christmases, we were so poor, we had to buy food as gifts. I never went to my prom because I couldn't afford it. I still don't have a driver's license because I can't afford a car. I've never even been on a vacation! You pathetic, delusional, excuse of a man. Because of you, I will never have children and put them through what I went through. Because of you, my mother became an alcoholic. Because of you, I never had a childhood. Even a druggie like Seth is better than you. Please, just stay out of my life. It's much better if you're not in it." she said almost shaking. Sam said nothing and just looked at. He looked like he was about to cry.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, Patti. Just understand, I had no choice. I couldn't say no." he said

Patti got up and walked over to her father.

"You're not an astronaut Sam. You're a loser. You've always been a loser and you're always going to be a loser. I tell people that my father is dead because to me, you are. Now, please just go back to where you were and forget about me. I am not your daughter." said Patti starting to cry

"But, you are my daughter. They let me see you over the years, allowed me to spy on you, and see how you were doing. I know you had your first boyfriend when you were 15. I know you got pregnant at 17 and had to abort the baby. I know how hard it was for you to do that. I wished I could have been there to help you. I know your mother had to sell herself to make the rent money. I know you started smoking because you didn't even care if it killed you. I know you dropped out of high school. I know you are very smart but very angry. That anger is going to kill you. You're angry at me, but it's not me the anger is going to kill, it's you. You've got to stop being so angry." he said and tried to put his arms around her

She pushed him away and was now sobbing. Her boss stuck his head out the doorway and yelled "Patti? We need you in here."

"I gotta go. Please Sam, just leave me alone. You've done enough damage already." she said and walked away.

Sam watched his daughter disappear in the doorway. He sat down on the curb and looked up at the stars as the tears rolled down his face.

Seth woke Patti the next morning in a panic.

"Babe, I need a hundred bucks," he said

"What? Why?" she said half awake

"I need to buy some clothes for a job interview," he said looking for her purse.

"Here," she said, reaching over the bed and grabbing her purse.

Seth found the money. "Thanks, babe, I'll see you tonight," he said and ran out of the room.

Patti wanted to ask him more, but she closed her eyes and was back sound asleep a minute later.

She went back to sleep for several hours. She had just woken up when her phone rang. She did not recognize the number. She thought it might be for Seth, so she answered.

"Hello?"

"Patti?" said the voice, she quickly recognized it was her father's.

"Sam, what do you want?" she asked

"I just wanted to check up on you, make sure you're okay."

"If you're looking for an apology for last night, keep looking," she said lighting up a cigarette

"No, you have every right to be honest with me. I was just hoping I could meet you for coffee. You can yell at me some more if you want." he said

"Sam, I told you last night, I don't want to see you. You're a day late and a dollar short as usual," she said

"Well, I want to see you. I'm not going to take no for an answer."

"Goodbye Sam," she said and hung up on him. She put her phone down. She didn't have to work tonight and decided to stop by her mother's house to fill her in on her Sam drama. She had thought that perhaps she was a bit too hard on him and should at least say she doesn't really hate him, even though she pretty much did. She was very angry and tried to keep it bottled up as best she could. But Sam deserved the shellacking he got last night. If nothing else, he knew exactly where the two of them stood. She got dressed and headed over to her mother's house.

When her mom was sober, she could actually be a great person. She had been sober for three months this time, which was no small accomplishment. She was going to AA meetings and now had a sponsor. She and her mother shared some coffee and talked about their favorite tv show. Eventually, her mother asked about Sam and Patti filled her in as best she could. Her mother just shook her head and lit up a cigarette.

"You know the first time he disappeared, he was working on his masters. He just vanished for over two weeks. I didn't know if he was alive or dead. I called the police. I filed a missing person report. I didn't know what to do. He comes home one night and acts like he's been gone for ten minutes. Turned on the TV and put his feet up. I almost killed him."

"Where did he go?"

"Who knows. Said he couldn't tell me. Said I wouldn't believe him anyway. I didn't know what to think. I loved him though. I was carrying his baby. I was young and very naïve. I should've known then what I was getting into. Look, honey.....your father is sick. In his head, he's very ill. He's a good man in his heart. He'd give you the shirt off his back if you asked for it, but the rest of him is not well. The first time he told me about his "friends" I really started to worry. Just go

easy on him. We've all got our crosses to bear. It's sad really. Someone as brilliant as your father, handicapped by mental illness."

"It is weird though, looking at him."

"How's that?"

"He doesn't look much older than I am and he's almost twice my age."

"He won the genetics lottery, that's for sure."

"I mean, there's no way he really did go to Mars, right? It's all in his head?"

"Honey, don't you start getting sucked into his delusions and illness too. You must remember that no matter what he says or how normal he seems, he's schizophrenic. That's the simple truth of the matter."

"I hope it skips a generation. Still, I am curious where he's been."

"I'm sure in time, he'll tell you, or at least drop hints, that is if he stays around long enough this time."

"Yeah, I don't think he'll stay around long. If I had to choose between Earth and Mars, I'd leave too," said Patti

"Look, I know it's hard. I know you're mad at him. I'm mad at him too. I'd make him pay us back child support if I thought we'd ever see any money. As angry as I am with him, I've also accepted the fact that he's nuts and doesn't really know what he's doing."

"Yeah, maybe I was a little too hard on him. Well, he'll be gone soon and we can go back to our lives," said Patti.

Patti was looking for some old photos of her and her father when she found the wad of cash in a shoebox. There were thousands of dollars in hundreds and twenties. Patti was stunned. She had never seen that kind of money before in her life. She knew it belonged to Seth. At that moment she knew he had been lying to her right from the start of their relationship. Why was he asking her for money when he had tons of it right here? She was now furious. He had left a few hours ago for some "hang time" with the boys. She had met his boys once and was not impressed. Most of them seemed like middle-aged losers acting like wanna-be gang bangers. She was about to head out to track him down when he showed up at the house when her phone rang. It was her father.

"Hello, Sam."

"Patti, I need you to listen to me. You have to come to my hotel room at once. It's very, very important."

"Sure it is Sam. Did you run out of money again.?"



"Goddamn it girl, will you listen to me. I need you to get out of that house and come down to my motel room as soon as possible. I'll explain everything once you're here."

"Jesus Sam, I haven't even had my coffee yet this morning," said Patti

"Patti, please. If you don't come at once, something very, very bad is going to happen."

"Sam, you're pathetic."

"Patti!"

"Fine, where are you? I'll be right there."

Sam gave her the address and told her she could stop for coffee on the way, just to get out of the apartment at once. Something told Patti she should listen to her father and threw some shoes and socks on and was out the door in under two minutes. It was almost as if her father was standing right beside her in the apartment screaming at her to get out. She drove by Seth and didn't even wave back at him. She saw him pull into the parking lot in her rearview mirror. As angry as she was at Seth, she was more upset with her part-time father for dragging her out of her apartment without coffee.

Patti found the motel on the other side of town. It looked like skid row. At least her father wasn't technically homeless. He met her as soon as she got out of her car.

"Okay, Sam, what the hell is so important?"

"I'm sorry honey, I had to get you out of that apartment as soon as possible."

"Why?"

"Because the police are serving a warrant on Seth. They're going to find a lot of drugs and drug money in the apartment. If you were there they would have arrested you too and thrown you in jail. I couldn't let that happen to you."

"Whoa, what the hell are you talking about? What do you mean the police are at my apartment," said Patti. She dialed Seth's phone number, but all she got was voicemail. She then sent him a text but got no reply.

"Sam, how did you know the police were going to raid my apartment?" she asked

"Does it matter?" he replied

"I think it matters a lot. A whole hell of a lot, now tell me how you knew."

"I just knew. Can we leave it at that? All that matters is that you're alright and that scumbag Seth is behind bars where he can't hurt you anymore." said Sam

"Did you call the police and tell them Seth had drugs in our apartment?"

"Honey, they've been watching Seth and his gang for months. The judge signed the bench warrant this morning. He's got so much coke and meth, he's going to get hit with federal sentencing guidelines. Is that the type of person you want to spend the rest of your life with?" asked Sam

Patti called one of her friends to see if he could give her some answers. He lived down the street. He told her from his lawn he could see a bunch of cop cars in front of her apartment.

"Guess they finally busted Seth huh?" he said

"Wait, you knew he was dealing and didn't tell me?" she asked irately

"Sorry babe, he told me he would kill me and burn down my house if I ever told you," he said

"Jesus, some friend you are," she said and hung up on him.

"Well, I guess I should thank you, Sam, looks like you did me a huge favor. Now I don't have to break up with Seth in person, the prison walls should do that for me."

"I'm sorry this happened to you. I know you cared about him," said Sam sensing her hurt

"Yeah, well, he certainly didn't care about me. Story of my life. I want the bad boy. I get the bad boy and he does bad boy things and I get hurt. Boy us girls really are stupid aren't we?"

"It's not stupid to want to fall in love with somebody. I fell in love with your mother," said Sam

"You mean you knocked up my mother."

"No, I fell in love with her the first night I met her. Having you was just a wonderful surprise."

"I'll bet I was. Look at me. I'm fat and gross and my name is Patti! What normal man is going to want to be with me?" said Patti crying

"You are not gross. You're a beautiful woman. Your husband thinks you're a beautiful woman too and smart and most of all, you are a great mother to your children."

"What are you talking about Sam?" asked Patti nearly hysterical

"Your husband. The man you meet three years from now at your job. You fall in love, get married, and have two boys together. Then you start raising organic vegetables in Washington on your farm." said Sam

"Sam....what in the hell are you talking about?"

"Do you think I would have ever left if I thought you were not going to be okay? I refused. So my friends showed me a glimpse of your future life. You are going to be so happy Patti. All your suffering and pain and anguish. It makes you into the strong loving person you are today. You had to go through all those rough years to make you what you are. A wonderful person. I am so proud of you." said Sam.

"Sam, you're nuts," she said with tears streaming down her face.

"Maybe, but I'm also your father and I love you very much."

Patti stood in front of her father. She moved closer to him and put her arms around him.

"Thanks, Dad, I love you too."

"They are telling me it's time to go." he said pulling away

"What, are you serious? Really, right now, you have to go?" she asked in disbelief

"I just do what I'm told honey."

"Just when I think you might actually be a decent human being. Just when I think maybe, just maybe there is one person in this world who doesn't suck, just when I start to feel something again, you pull this?" she said

"I will always be with you, Patti. Always. I have to go. I don't know when I'll be back." he said and kissed her on the forehead. He started walking away.

"I HATE YOU!" Patti screamed

"And I love you. More than you will ever know," he said and waved goodbye to her. He opened his motel room door and stepped inside, closing it behind him.

Patti was irate. She was not going to let her father off the hook that easy. He was not just going to come in and out of her life whenever it suited him. She was really going to let him have it. She walked up to her father's motel room door and flung it open.

"YOU SON OF A BITCH!.....you....." she stopped to see that her father wasn't in the room. She went into the bathroom and saw he wasn't in there either. The bed was neatly made. Nothing looked out of place. Her father had just vanished. She saw there were no windows in the back. She looked under the beds and nothing. Her father was gone. She walked back over to her car. It was time to throw caution to the wind.

Patti spent the night at her mother's house. The next day the police let her back into her apartment under the condition that if she finds any drugs she is to turn them into the sheriff's office immediately. It was one afternoon a few weeks later when she was sitting in her living room watching tv, that her phone rang. She didn't recognize the number, but she picked up anyway.

"Hello, is Seth...I'm sorry I can't quite read his last name, there?"

"No, he's in jail. Bail is five hundred thousand. I don't think we'll be seeing Mr. Seth for quite some time."

"I see, well my name is Kevin Barber. I'm a seed technician here at the Niagara Seed Company. I'm a seed scientist. Seth dropped these seeds off a few days ago to our lab and asked that we have them tested. I'm sorry, whom am I speaking to?" asked Barber

"The owner of those seeds. My name is Patricia. Everyone calls me Patty, but I really don't like the name."

"Yes, well Patricia. I must say, these seeds are extraordinary. In fact, we've never seen anything like them before. They are a completely new species. I must ask where did you get these seeds?"

"From my father."

"And may I inquire as to where your father got them?"

"From a plant on Mars."

"I see. Well, is there some way I could contact your father? I hate to ask but these seeds are a very big deal here."

"Contact my father, no I'm afraid not. He's out of the solar system at the moment."

"Yes, well Patricia, these seeds are going to make you and your father famous. This is probably the biggest scientific discovery of the century.

"Well, whatever you do, just don't plant them," said Patti

She hung up the phone and went back to watching her TV show.

"I wonder what Dad will bring home next time?" she thought and went back to watching TV on her couch. Her Dad was crazy, he had to be. Seeds from Mars and getting married with children? It's like he didn't even know her at all.....or did he?

*Father knows best. Some parents despise their children, others are indifferent. In Patti's case, her father had come across thousands of light-years to save her. Love comes in all shapes and sizes.....and it doesn't care how many light years it has to cross.*